



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe | Year B



Parable
of Christ: "Separating the sheep from the goats," mosaic of a Ravennate Italian-Byzantine workshop,
completed within 526 AD by the so-called "Master of Sant'Apollinare."
Basilica of [Sant'Apollinare Nuovo](#) in [Ravenna](#), Italy.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

(Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option 2: Use the prayer provided below.

Divine Praises of Saint Francis

You are holy, Lord,
the only God,
and your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong,
you are great,
you are the Most High,
you are the almighty King.
You, holy Father,
are King of the heaven and earth.
You are Three and One,
God above all gods.
You are good, all good,
supreme good,
Lord God, living and true.
You are love,
You are wisdom,
You are humility,
You are endurance,
You are beauty,
You are gentleness,
You are security,
You are rest,
You are joy.
You are our hope and happiness,
You are justice and moderation,
You are all our riches,
You are beauty,
You are gentleness,
You are our protector,

You are our guardian
and defender.
You are strength,
You are consolation,
You are our hope,
You are our faith,
You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness,
You are our eternal life,
great and admirable Lord,
God almighty,
merciful Savior.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Word worksheets
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Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

Editor: Bill Huebsch

Published cooperatively by
TeamRCIA.com and
PastoralPlanning.com.

Liturgical Context

The Gospels of these weeks culminate in today's liturgy—Jesus' eschatological teaching regarding what one must do to gain eternal life.

- ▶ In this last day of the liturgical cycle we contemplate God's ultimate act of salvation—the death and resurrection of his only Son and the salvation he won for us.
- ▶ We contemplate on final judgment and whether or not we will be ready when the Lord calls us home. .
- ▶ The feast of the Solemnity of Christ the King is called an idea feast.
- ▶ It recalls the feast of Ascension, Epiphany and Palm Sunday—all feasts that exalt Christ in his sovereign Kingship.
- ▶ Pope Pius XI instituted this feast in his Encyclical Letter *Quas primas*, Dec.11, 1925. It was in response to the destructive evils of the time. He insisted that only the sovereignty of Christ's Lordship and Kingship over the world was a force powerful enough to overcome such evil and destruction.
- ▶ "...It is necessary that the royal dignity of Our Lord be recognized and accepted as widely as possible. To this end it seems to us that nothing else would help so effectively as the institution of a special feast dedicated to Christ our King. The annual celebration of the sacred mysteries is more effective in informing people about the Faith and in bringing them the joys of the spiritual life than the solemn pronouncements of the teaching Church. Documents are often read only by a few learned men; feasts move and teach all the faithful. The former speaks but once; the latter every year and forever. The former bring a saving touch to the intellect; the latter influence not only the mind but the heart and man's whole nature".¹
- ▶ The world was experiencing the emergence of fascism, and the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. The Church lost its political power and the immorality of the twenties was rampant.
- ▶ This feast was eventually moved to the last Sunday of the liturgical year.
- ▶ The focus addresses the theology of eschatology—last things, end times, eternal life and anticipation of Christ's return.
- ▶ The liturgy of Christ the King upholds Christ's universal reign and Lordship not just evident in today's liturgy but celebrated in every Eucharistic liturgy.
- ▶ There are consonant themes at the end of the liturgical year with the beginning of the New Year. Both the ending and the beginning exalt the Christ who is Lord of the Universe and who reigns as Lord and King of the world and who will one day return to take us all home to be with him forever in eternity.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

¹AAS 17 (1925), 593-610. In Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1979), 177.

First Reading: Daniel 7:13-14

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The prophet Daniel tells of the Son of Man coming on a cloud as King of the cosmos.
- ▶ The prophet Daniel proclaims the end of the cosmic age.
- ▶ In order to understand today's narrative it is important to recall the context in which it was written, thus echo the same interpretive material from last week's first reading from the Book of Daniel.
- ▶ The Book of Daniel is an eschatological (concerned with end times and last things) proclamation par excellence.
- ▶ Daniel insists that God will deliver his people; they will rise again.
- ▶ The Book of Daniel is the earliest recording of belief in the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament.
- ▶ The righteous will be separated from the unjust. The former will enjoy eternal life with God and the evil ones will experience eternal shame.
- ▶ Resurrection implies conversion of heart, metanoia, a radical change. Those who experienced resurrected life will shine like heavenly stars.
- ▶ Daniel's proclamation of the Son of Man and his royal arrival on a cloud is a perfect accompaniment to the proclamation of Christ the King of the universe in the Gospel text.
- ▶ The book is resplendent with the common ancient literary tools of apocalyptic visions, interplanetary activity and dreams of crumbling nations to drive home the purpose of the text.
- ▶ The pericope is a word of hope and encouragement to people suffering persecution for their faith. (See last week's first reading.) The underlying subtext is "DO NOT BE AFRAID." God will be victorious despite all evidence to the contrary.
- ▶ God is sovereign over the cosmos.
- ▶ The original meaning of *Son of Man* was *human being*. Daniel juxtaposed the original meaning and gave the term greater depth.
- ▶ Daniel proclaimed the *Son of Man* to be of divine origin emanating from the heavens. He would be a great leader of God's holy people.
- ▶ Jesus used the term in reference to himself. He was more than mere human being. His identity could only be revealed through faith.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ In what way are you able to relate this reading to your own life experience?
- ▶ What is the Good News in Daniel's reading for you and for your community?

- ▶ Why does your community need to hear this word at this time?
- ▶ In what way do you need to be encouraged and exhorted to more committed discipleship?
- ▶ Why do we need the image of Son of Man—divine being, master and Lord of the universe? Why do you need this image in your life right now?

Second Reading: Revelation 1:5-8

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The author exalts Christ who comes in the clouds and sits on a throne of glory.

The Book of Revelation is often misunderstood. Included in the Appendix is an overview of the Book of Revelation to help the catechist better understand this amazing prophetic text. Questions are always raised about this book of the Bible because it has been so literally misinterpreted. Thus it is important to understand the heart and context of this Biblical narrative.

- ▶ Jesus addresses the people of God.
- ▶ Jesus loves us now and forever.
- ▶ His love is eternal; it is not bound by time and space.
- ▶ His love extends beyond the resurrection event.
- ▶ The text speaks of atonement for sin accomplished through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ.
- ▶ The redemption won by Christ's sacrifice resulted in the creation of a new community of believers who continue his priestly and royal ministry.
- ▶ The text is resplendent with creedal statements and doxologies that give praise and glory to the eternal King of the Cosmos.
- ▶ God is proclaimed as eternal in the designation of alpha and omega—God in Christ always is, always was and always will be.
- ▶ God in Christ is the Lord of Hosts, the Lord of heaven and earth.
- ▶ Jesus returned to his throne of glory where he assumes his role as Lord and King of the cosmos.
- ▶ He redeemed the world over which he has dominion.
- ▶ The reading echoes a liturgical proclamation.
- ▶ Jesus' death and bloodshed are remembered, celebrated and made present in the community.
- ▶ As a result of his sacrificial death and resurrection his messianic kingdom was established and believers are heirs and participants in that kingdom.
- ▶ Jesus continues to gift us with his presence from his throne of glory.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to the teaching in this reading?
- ▶ In what way is the reality of Christ who sits on his throne of glory relevant to your life?
- ▶ Why is this Good News for us, for you?
- ▶ What should be our response to this reading? What is the challenge for our lives?

Gospel: John 18: 33b-37

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ Today's Gospel is an excerpt taken from John's Good Friday passion narrative. This exegesis of John's passion is based on Raymond E. Brown's "*A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*." John's passion narrative is proclaimed every Good Friday.
- ▶ Brown asserts that the Jesus of the Good Friday passion is a far different Jesus than the Jesus portrayed in the Synoptic gospels.
- ▶ John's Jesus is the divine Christ who always existed--there never was a time when Christ did not exist. In John's Passion narrative Jesus is aware of his pre-existence. "Through death, therefore, he is returning to a state he has temporarily left during his stay in this world. (17:5)"² After Jesus' death, he returns to his eternal home.
- ▶ Jesus is in control of his own destiny. He is completely and totally aware of his surroundings. The Jesus of John's Gospel is the omniscient-all knowing Christ. He freely offers his life. Jesus is not afraid. He knows he will be victorious over Satan.
- ▶ John's portrayal of Jesus is the portrait most commonly taught to the faithful.

² Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*, (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 57

John's intent throughout his Gospel is to proclaim the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Logos—God's Word, the divine Lord who is Master of the saving events that surround him.

- ▶ John's Jesus is the king who succumbs to no one. He does not pray that God deliver him from the horror to come. He proceeds with power, conviction and a sense of purpose. No power or principality has control over him or his destiny.
- ▶ Jesus comes before Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law and is interrogated by the police. They see if there is enough to hold him on charges of insurrection. If so, he could then be tried in a Roman court. Jesus is so clever with Annas that his captors abuse him.
- ▶ One gets swept away in the drama of unfolding events. Jesus stands before Pilate.
- ▶ The main centerpiece of Jesus' legal problems is his confrontation with Pilate. His encounter with Caiaphas is given little attention.
- ▶ Jesus enters into confrontation with secular, Roman political power.
- ▶ Pilate appears to be in command of Jesus' arraignment, hoping to intimidate him into condemning himself with his own words. If Jesus were to affirm his claim to kingship then Pilate would have a clear-cut case against him. Rebellion, sedition and treason against Caesar were punishable by death.
- ▶ John cleverly uses the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate to illuminate the meaning of his royal status.
- ▶ Pilate wants to know why the Jewish religious leaders brought Jesus to him to adjudicate what seemed him to be a Jewish problem—not a secular problem. Pilate has his suspicions that he is being used as a political pawn. Jesus does not make it easy for him. Jesus wants Pilate to explain his definition of kingship. Pilate is not interested in religious semantics.
- ▶ Jesus answers Pilate's question and in the process presents the Church with a theological foundation for today's feast that honors Christ the King.
- ▶ Jesus' kingdom did not come from this world. Jesus' kingdom had no army to defend it. Jesus' kingdom had no base of operation, no throne room, no palace to house its glory.
- ▶ Jesus forced no one to believe in his message; it was offered freely to any and all who would believe.
- ▶ Jesus' kingdom was based on love and non-violence. Jesus kingdom had no hidden agenda to overthrow secular ruling authority.
- ▶ Jesus' kingdom was a community of servants rather than masters.
- ▶ Jesus' explained his definition of kingship. If indeed that is what Pilate had in mind when he asked Jesus the question, then indeed Jesus was a King.
- ▶ Jesus kingship was divine in origin.
- ▶ The Jewish community was outside waiting to see what Pilate would do. Jesus and Pilate are face to face. Scripture scholar Raymond Brown insists that it is Pilate who is put on trial. He knows the truth. The question is: "Will he witness to the truth or will he allow himself to be swept away by the mob? " Tension mounts. Jesus is in control of his own future—of that we can be sure. Will Pilate give in to the people he is supposed to govern or will he lead as he should? We know his choice. He chooses to save face rather than to bear witness to the truth.

- ▶ Jesus was in control. Pilate was certainly outshined by his intellectual superior. Jesus was a master at the art of riposte and repartee and cleverly used it in his exchange with the one who thought he was in control and the one who actually was (Jesus!) Jesus hardly stands mute as he did in Mark's Gospel. Jesus defends himself.
- ▶ Jesus did not refuse the title Pilate hurled at him: "King of the Jews". If Pilate wanted to refer to him in that manner so be it. However, his mission was not to be an earthly king or ruler, his mission was to testify to the truth—to witness to it. (John 18:37).

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material the Passion narrative has rich material for our serious reflection. The following material is presented in order to give an overall interpretation of John's entire Passion narrative. While there is more material than can possibly be used, this serves as background information for the catechist as he or she prepares for this session.
- ▶ John's Gospel is a Gospel of contrasts. Jesus' strength and sense of purpose and destiny stands in stark contrast to Peter's weakness. Peter stands in contrast to the beloved disciple of John's Gospel--the "Beloved Disciple" who was at the Last Supper, the trial, the foot of the cross, the empty tomb and at the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.
- ▶ The "Beloved Disciple" according to John is a witness to events, the one who is most enlightened and the one who loves Jesus the most. Peter is not held up as the perfect disciple, the Beloved Disciple, on the other hand does have that distinction.
- ▶ The Jews, particularly the Zealots, misinterpreted the prophecies regarding the coming of the messiah. Messianic fever was at an all time high at the time of Jesus.
- ▶ The people were living under Roman occupation and oppression. Conditions were ripe for a messiah to come and save the people—a military, grand warrior, like David, who would lead the people to glory and re-establish the former glory of Israel.
- ▶ The messiah they were looking for and the messiah they received were two different things. The messiah they received was the Suffering Servant of the Book of Isaiah—who suffered for the sins of the many. The messiah they wanted was a military-type folk hero.
- ▶ Jesus was sentenced to a tortuous scourging. His cloak was ripped from him and he was processed to his death on Calvary. Every narrative of the Passion from all four evangelists points the accusing finger at the crowd by placing the words "Crucify him!" on their lips. John's version however shows more intensity than all the others. Jesus was crowned with the cloak of a king and a crown of thorns was placed on his head. He now stands utterly alone—complete abandonment.

- ▶ His own people abandon him. The Jewish people choose Caesar over their own son, thus forfeiting access to the messianic reign coming alive before their very eyes. It is a tragedy of epic proportions. Pilate extracts fidelity to Caesar in the final scene thereby ensuring their abdication of any hopes for participation in the messianic kingdom of God.³ Pilate handed Jesus over to the priests to be crucified.
- ▶ The final act of this unfolding drama comes crashing down. Jesus willingly offers his life. He carries his own cross. Pilate puts the charge (titulus) over his head—“King of the Jews.” John, the evangelist, theologian and master of irony, has none other than Pilate—the official head of government—declare the sovereignty of Jesus as King—while at the same time his own people rejected his kingship. Again, a tragedy of epic proportions! This Lord and King reigned from his wooden throne--the wood of the cross.
- ▶ John has Jesus wearing a seamless garment. Some scholars suggest that it is an allusion to the white garment worn by the high priest, reminding us today, if so, of the second reading for today’s liturgy, the letter to the Hebrews in which Jesus reigns not only as king but as the new High Priest. Other opinions suggest that the garment was a symbol of unity [p 64].
- ▶ Mark and Matthew have Jesus completely and totally alone and abandoned at the cross. John symbolically places Mary and the Beloved disciple at the foot of the cross as a reminder that a new family was just created. Mary is named mother of the Beloved Disciple and the Beloved Disciple is named son, thus becoming Jesus’ brother. Jesus created a family of disciples right from the cross—the birthplace of the church.⁴
- ▶ John’s use of symbolism extends to the wine soaked hyssop that Jesus was given. The leaf used to sprinkle blood on the doorposts of the Israelites, thus saving the first-born children from the angel of death in the exodus story, was called hyssop. John intimately connects Jesus with the paschal lamb. Jesus was sentenced at high noon—the exact time when the high priests slaughtered all the lambs for Passover. Jesus fulfilled John the Baptist’s prophetic utterance: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” His bones were not broken, thus connecting him symbolically to the unblemished paschal lamb, whose bones were also not broken.
- ▶ Jesus even controlled the timing of his own death. He said, “It is finished” and then he handed over his spirit. Raymond Brown tells us that John, more than the other Gospels, captures and maintains a very ancient Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Jesus, was “an intimate part of

3 Brown alerts us to the anti-Jewish sentiment in John’s gospel. He tells us that we are not to ignore it or sugar coat it. It was real. There was tension between Christians and Jews. It was not just leveled at the leadership, but it was against the synagogue. His community suffered great persecution at the hands of their Jewish brothers and sisters. They were thrown out of the synagogue, which made them very vulnerable. The Romans allowed the Jews to coexist, but were suspicious of Christians. The hostility was deep, and it was bitter. However, we are not to use it as a cause and source of anti-Jewish sentiment, but rather understand it in light of the cultural and religious problems of the first century. (Word and Worship Workbook, Year C, 222.)

4 Raymond E. Brown, *A Crucified Christ in Holy Week*, 64.

the death and resurrection.”⁵ John’s Gospel is adamant that the Spirit was not given to Jesus’ followers until that moment. He further tells us that this is illustrated even further when Jesus breathed his Spirit upon them when he appeared to them on Easter Sunday night. (20:22).

- ▶ The other evangelists portray turbulent, miraculous signs surrounding the scene—the Temple curtain is torn, saints come forth from tombs, and a Roman centurion expresses awe-filled faith. John, on the other hand, localizes all the signs in Jesus’ body. Jesus’ side is pierced and blood and water flow from it. Earlier in John we heard that within Jesus living water would flow; that water would be the Spirit, given when Jesus entered his glory.
- ▶ Another symbolic meaning to the flow of water and blood is initiatory—the water of baptism and the blood of the Eucharist—that by which new members are incorporated into Christ’s Body. It is on Calvary the Spirit is poured forth on the Church; it is on Calvary the Church is born. “The Church was born at the foot of the cross through the water of baptism and the blood of Eucharist that flowed from his side”.⁶
- ▶ Jesus was removed from the cross in a dignified, manner—that befitting a king (see picture above), resplendent with myrrh, oil, and cloth wrappings. Nicodemus, who had before been reluctant to step forward and openly acknowledge discipleship, now does so. “At his death, Jesus continued to reconcile sinners to himself. Jesus died as he lived in John’s gospel: as a conquering, royal king, in charge of his own destiny, who overcame the sins of the world. Jesus fought the great battle with Satan and was victorious.”⁷
- ▶ The cross was transformed from a symbol of torture, death and execution of an innocent victim, to a symbol of victory, vindication and life. Faithful disciples grieve and mourn, true, but paradoxically they are filled with joy. They offer praise and thanks to God for so great a sacrifice and gift, for the incredible mercy of God who loved us so greatly that he sent his SON to die for a sinful world.

⁵ Ibid. 66

⁶ Mary Birmingham, *Word and Worship Workbook, Year C*, Paulist Press, 1998, 223.

⁷ Ibid.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ How does this Gospel speak to your life at this time in your life?
- ▶ Why did Jesus have to die in order to save us? What does that teach us about God, about Jesus? About me?
- ▶ Put yourself in the place of Pilate, Jesus' disciples, the bystanders and the Jewish leaders. Where do you honestly believe you would be standing if you were present at Jesus' trial? What are the implications for us today?
- ▶ What does Jesus' Lordship and Kingship mean for your life?
- ▶ What is going on in your life right now that would find deep meaning in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ?
- ▶ In what way is the kingdom Jesus came to establish a reality today?
- ▶ The Church teaches that when we join the joys and sorrows of our lives to Jesus' passion, death and resurrection we share in the ongoing redemption of the world. What does that mean to you and in what way does that speak to your life at this time in your life? What joys and what sorrows are you willing to join to the cross of Christ?
- ▶ What kind of a Messiah are you seeking? How do you feel about the reality that God sent us a suffering Messiah? How does that speak to our lives?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel invite you to be a better disciple?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

PRAYER OF SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

Lord Jesus, Let Me Know Myself

Lord Jesus, let me know myself and know you,
And desire nothing save only you.
Let there be less of me and more of you.
Let me do everything for the sake of you.
Let me humble myself and exalt you.
Let me think of nothing except you.
Let me die to myself and live in you.
Let me accept whatever happens as from you.
Let me banish self and follow you,
And ever desire to follow you.
Let me fly from myself and take refuge in you,
That I may deserve to be defended by you.
Let me fear for myself, let me fear you,
And let me be among those who are chosen by you.
Let me distrust myself and put my trust in you.
Let me be willing to obey for the sake of you.
Let me cling to nothing save only to you,
And let me be poor because of you.
Look upon me, that I may love you.
Call me that I may see you,
And for ever enjoy you.

Amen.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

APPENDIX

- Why did Jesus have to die in order to save us? What does that teach us about God, about Jesus? About me?

Whenever I consider this question I refer to Louis Marie Chauvet. Within every sacrament we experience the total kenosis ----self-emptying of Jesus on the cross---an emptying he gives as a sign of God's love for the human race. Sacramental theologian Louis Marie Chauvet insists that in every sacrament we are privileged participants in the drama between the Father and the Son—the son who completely empties himself in the face of total abandonment. The innocent tortured Son who echoes psalm 22's lament of an innocent sufferer—"My God, My God why have you abandoned me?" In the sacraments we are given privileged access to the intimacy between the Father and the Son---the grief-stricken Father, the near despairing and ultimately abandoned Son.

The Father Jesus defended with his life is the same Father who could send armies to rescue him. Yet, what does God do? God remains silent. The Father hides his face. What kind of a Father is he? He is a Father not just of the Son, but of all those the Son came to save. Jesus had work left to do—he had to take his love for humanity to its final and ultimate conclusion. To be in solidarity with the human condition meant that Jesus had to experience death in the face of God's silence, a God who spares no one from it—not even his own faithful Son.

Jesus had to experience the absolute separation of human death and abandonment before he could be truly one with the human race. Chauvet insists that the Paschal Mystery that is present in the sacraments introduces us to a Christ who knows what it means to be abandoned, tortured and seemingly without hope –who poured himself out for every broken person in the world---for us in our times of abandonment and who invites us to offer the same kenosis for others.

Every time we come to the sacraments we are invited to empty ourselves as offering for those who are most abandoned and in so doing share in the ongoing redemption of the cross. What Christ says to us in the sacraments is: Do you know how much I love you? "This much." Then he stretched out his arms and he died.

I take great consolation in a God who stretches out his arms and says to me in the joys and sorrows of my life—when we delight in the precious gift of family and grandchildren, when my daughter suffered a miscarriage, when my son was diagnosed with mental illness, when my daughter suffered the effects of living across the street from the World Trade Center, when we celebrated the safe return of our son-in-law from Afghanistan and when I was given the amazing gift of new life from my son who offered his kidney so I could live, Jesus reaches down from his cross, stretches out his arms and says to me and my family, "See how much I love you? Go and love others as I have loved you."

Overview of the Book of Revelation

The book is written as an apocalypse (*Greek: apokalypsis=revelation*), much like the Book of Daniel. Common to the apocalypse is proclamation of visions. The vision included in this book concerns God's judgment. It is not a prediction of the end of the world as many suppose it is.

The book is written in the style of Jewish apocalypse but it is different in so far as it includes an address to the seven churches of Asia Minor and it has a known author. The book is both apocalyptic and eschatological—that is it is concerned with the theology of final judgment, the end of time and last things.

John is the author and he writes to the persecuted Christian churches. John insists his authority comes from his witness of Christ's death and resurrection and the establishment of his Messianic reign on earth; it is all the authority he needs.

Martyrs who experience persecution for their faith can take hope in the promise of the resurrected Christ. John was Christ's new prophet. Speculation has it that he was John of the Gospels or the author of the Fourth Gospel. Scholars doubt that assertion since the style of revelation in no way resembles the style of John's Gospel.

The book includes apocalypses, liturgy, hymnody, professions of faith, curses, laments, antiphons and dirges. Use of the *myth* is also evident as is observed in the birth and death of the divine child, the marriage of the Lamb and his bride, Michael against evil, the dragon and angels, the divine warrior and the Lamb as ruler who rules the world from a throne.

The book, no doubt influenced by the letters of Paul, is written in letter form, ending with a blessing and benediction. John of Patmos uses the vision of assembly of the gods to echo God's divine council. The Book of Revelation uses the common holy war imagery found in the Old Testament in which the gods defeat the forces of chaos. Revelation juxtaposes this war motif and uses it as an image in which war is waged against Satan and his army.

Another common biblical image is the divine book in which names of the just are recorded. John also alludes to the city of heaven and the city of earth drawing contrasts between the two. The monster's struggle with the divine child draws from an ancient, common biblical image similar to the sea monster of Job 41 and mentioned again in Isaiah 27:1.

Many of the prophet's visions reveal a heavenly liturgy. Old Testament prophets proclaimed God's will and God's word on earth. The prophet of Revelation, however, accomplishes his prophetic work in heaven.

Revelation is written in the spirit of the letters written to the early Christian churches as observed in the seven letters written to the Asia Minor churches. John of Patmos' consistent theme is strength in the face of suffering and persecution. Christians are called to be steadfast. Christians are not to be swayed by false teachers but remain steadfast in the faith. All who listen and take heed to the words of the prophet will be blessed by the greatest Martyr of all—Jesus the Christ—the alpha and omega—the beginning and end of all creation.

As is typical of apocalyptic material there is a sense of urgency and judgment. Christians must be

prepared at all times to greet the Christ who will come in all majesty to gather and rule the nations from his throne. The author uses common ancient titles as a reference to Christ—Son of Man, Lamb of God and Son of David.

John speaks to the persecution that was coming upon the church. Christians were to remain strong in their faith when forced to worship Roman gods. Rome allowed a multitude of religions to co-exist as long as they did not interfere with Roman governance or the worship of Roman gods. Once a group acknowledged Roman gods they were then free to practice their own religion.

Judaism was a legally recognized religion and thus Jews were allowed to practice their monotheistic faith in relative peace. Christianity was not a legal religion and thus did not have the sanction of the state or protection of Judaism. The threat of persecution hung over the community like an oppressive, stench-filled blanket. Persecution and martyrdom could come knocking on their doors at any hour of the day. Emperors often demanded a test of allegiance by requiring subjects to worship Roman gods. While Jews were exempt from this requirement, the exemption did not transfer to Christians.

The Book of Revelation was probably written while under the dominion of the emperor Domitian (@95 AD). Today's fascination with the numbers 666 as mark of the beast was a first century reference to the Semitic alphabetic spelling of *Nero Caesar*. Any first century citizen would have been aware of that designation. Nero was the Caesar who falsely accused Christians of burning Rome and made them scapegoats for his crime. Since the Book of Revelation was not written in Rome the 666 reference was probably alluding to the prevalent belief that Nero would return from the dead and attack from the East.

Revelation 13:17 maintains that no commerce whatsoever could take place without the mark of the beast. Nothing could be bought or sold without using the Roman currency. The mark of the beast likely refers to the image of Caesar on the Roman coin. Jesus insisted that the coins were innocuous. Peter and Paul agreed that Christians could honor the emperor as one honors any dignitary or head of state.

The situation so drastically changed that by the time the Book of Revelations was written it became imperative that Christians avoid giving any homage to Roman domination. The prophet John was calling for a demanding, mature and risky discipleship.

Numbers play an important symbolic role in the book. The number four refers to the order of creation. The number seven is a reference to wholeness or completeness. The number twelve is a reference to Israel and her twelve tribes. The number of the beast is a reference to the Roman Empire.

Other symbolic references. Color also bears symbolic reference. White is the color of purity, victory and eternal happiness. Red refers to bloodshed. Black refers to economic instability and death. Horns refer to power and eyes to knowledge. A sharp sword is symbolic for God's word and God's judgment.

The Book of Revelation also deals with the separation of Christianity from Judaism. Christians believe they are a remnant of the true Israel. The Book also deals with the individual churches and the false teaching and preaching that was taking place in those churches. John worried that the Churches were giving too much accommodation to the prevailing culture. For some,

accommodation was in the interest of avoiding persecution, for others it was simply an economic accommodation.

The Book was written by Christians for Christians. It was never used to threaten or frighten people into submission or membership. When contemporary communities use the Book of Revelation in such a manner they completely miss the prophet's intent in the first place. John is preaching a word of encouragement, repentance and exhortation. He is calling the people to renew their original fervor of faith and to stand firm regardless of the suffering and persecution they will face. The visions were intended to remind them of the prize that awaited them in the new heavenly kingdom.

The Book was an invitation to explore and discover life's true meaning. Apocalyptic literature always emerges when history is on the precipice of cataclysmic events. Such literature always brings humanity front and center with its mortality and the purpose and meaning of life.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Thirty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time:
OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, KING OF THE UNIVERSE
Daniel 7:13-14 | Revelation 1:5-8 | John 18: 33b-37

Jesus Christ
Cross, Paschal Mystery
Salvation/Soteriology
Sacraments
Symbols of Bread and Wine

Eschatology, Heaven, Hell and
Purgatory.
Sacrament of Baptism
Liturgical Year

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

JESUS CHRIST

Today's Feast of Christ the King exalts Jesus as the King of the universe. He is the promised Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. What better Sunday is there to focus our attention on JESUS CHRIST?

CROSS and PASCHAL MYSTERY

This feast is feast par excellence in which to remember Christ, the Sovereign Lord and King who came to shepherd his people and save the world by the blood of the Cross. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

SACRAMENTS

Today's Feast of Christ the King exalts Jesus as the King of the universe. He is the promised Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His presence as Lord of Lords is present to us in the sacraments of the Church. His Paschal Mystery is made present in each sacrament. What better Sunday is there to focus our attention on SACRAMENTS that give us access to Christ of the Scriptures and Christ of the cosmic order?

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

Today's Feast of Christ the King exalts Jesus as the King of the universe. He is the promised Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. His presence as Lord of Lords is present to us in the sacraments of the Church. His Paschal Mystery is made present in each sacrament and most ultimately in the sacrament of EUCHARIST. What better

Sunday is there to focus our attention on **SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE** (or the Eucharistic Series, especially Session 3) that give us access to Christ of the Scriptures and Christ of the cosmic order?

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

This feast is feast par excellence in which to remember Christ, the Sovereign Lord and King who came to shepherd his people and save the world by the blood of the Cross. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about **SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY**.

ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL AND PURGATORY.

These last days of the liturgical year focus on last things, end times and Jesus' return. Today we hear portions of the Passion narrative from John's Gospel—the Passion we proclaim every Good Friday. The reason for Jesus' Incarnation, his life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension and the sending of the Spirit opens the gates of heaven to believers. The Gospel requires more than words; it requires faithful action. Those who live righteous lives can expect to be true citizens in the kingdom of God—here and now and in the hereafter. Such righteous people line up with the sheep not the goats. It is thus appropriate that today we focus our attention on **ESCHATOLOGY: END TIMES, HEAVEN, HELL, AND PURGATORY**.

BAPTISM

There is a tradition in the early Church in which people were baptized on this feast. People are baptized into the Lordship of Christ—his sovereignty in their lives, his kingdom and ultimately his saving mission. It is only fitting that this would be an acceptable feast for celebrating the sacrament that incorporates us into Christ's death and resurrection. Today we will focus our doctrinal session on the sacrament of **BAPTISM**.

LITURGICAL YEAR

Any Sunday of the year is an appropriate time to reflect on the cycle of the Church year. Every Sunday is a most appropriate time to address what we celebrate in the unfolding liturgical cycle. The entire mystery of Christ from his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit is manifested in one complete liturgical year. As the present Church year is winding down and a new year is soon to begin, it is appropriate that we address what the Church teaches about the **LITURGICAL YEAR**.